

## What to Do After a Flood or Flash Flood

- **Seek necessary medical care at the nearest hospital or clinic.** Contaminated flood waters lead to a greater possibility of infection. Severe injuries will require medical attention.
- **Help a neighbor who may require special assistance--infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.** Elderly people and people with disabilities may require additional assistance. People who care for them or who have large families may need additional assistance in emergency situations.
- **Avoid disaster areas.** Your presence might hamper rescue and other emergency operations, and put you at further risk from the residual effects of floods, such as contaminated waters, crumbled roads, landslides, mudflows, and other hazards.
- **Continue to listen to a NOAA Weather Radio or local radio or television stations and return home only when authorities indicate it is safe to do so.** Flood dangers do not end when the water begins to recede; there may be flood-related hazards within your community, which you could hear about from local broadcasts.
- **Stay out of any building if flood waters remain around the building.** Flood waters often undermine foundations, causing sinking, floors can crack or break and buildings can collapse.
- **Avoid entering ANY building (home, business, or other) before local officials have said it is safe to do so.** Buildings may have hidden damage that makes them unsafe. Gas leaks or electric or waterline damage can create additional problems.
- **Report broken utility lines to the appropriate authorities.** Reporting potential hazards will get the utilities turned off as quickly as possible, preventing further hazard and injury. Check with your utility company now about where broken lines should be reported.
- **Avoid smoking inside buildings.** Smoking in confined areas can cause fires.
- **When entering buildings, use extreme caution.** Building damage may have occurred where you least expect it. Watch carefully every step you take.
  - **Wear sturdy shoes.** The most common injury following a disaster is cut feet.
  - **Use battery-powered lanterns or flashlights when examining buildings.** Battery-powered lighting is the safest and easiest, preventing fire hazard for the user, occupants, and building.
  - **Examine walls, floors, doors, staircases, and windows to make sure that the building is not in danger of collapsing.**
  - **Inspect foundations for cracks or other damage.** Cracks and damage to a foundation can render a building uninhabitable.
  - **Look for fire hazards.** There may be broken or leaking gas lines, flooded electrical circuits, or submerged furnaces or electrical appliances. Flammable or explosive materials may travel from upstream. Fire is the most frequent hazard following floods.
  - **Check for gas leaks.** If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.
  - **Look for electrical system damage.** If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell burning insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice. Electrical equipment should be checked and dried before being returned to service.
  - **Check for sewage and waterline damage.** If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid using water from the tap. You can obtain safe water from undamaged water heaters or by melting ice cubes.
  - **Watch out for animals, especially poisonous snakes, that may have come into buildings with the flood waters. Use a stick to poke through debris.** Flood waters flush snakes and many animals out of their homes.
  - **Watch for loose plaster, drywall, and ceilings that could fall.**

- **Take pictures of the damage, both of the building and its contents, for insurance claims.**
- After returning home:
  - **Throw away food that has come in contact with flood waters.** Some canned foods may be salvageable. If the cans are dented or damaged, throw them away. Food contaminated by flood waters can cause severe infections.
  - **If water is of questionable purity, boil or add bleach, and distill drinking water before using.** (See information on water treatment under the ["Disaster Supplies Kit"](#) section.) Wells inundated by flood waters should be pumped out and the water tested for purity before drinking. If in doubt, call your local public health authority. Ill health effects often occur when people drink water contaminated with bacteria and germs.
  - **Pump out flooded basements gradually (about one-third of the water per day) to avoid structural damage.** If the water is pumped completely in a short period of time, pressure from water-saturated soil on the outside could cause basement walls to collapse.
  - **Service damaged septic tanks, cesspools, pits, and leaching systems as soon as possible.** Damaged sewage systems are health hazards.

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